



Coast Guard Flag Voice 38

QUALIFICATIONS-BASED ASSIGNMENTS

As the Coast Guard's human resources needs change, so must our policies and processes. Recently we have undertaken initiatives to use qualifications-based assignments in four specific areas: aviation, new buoy tenders, the new icebreaker HEALY, and surfmen. Our present enlisted assignment system is based primarily on assignment priority. Where a member serves and wants to serve are the major factors in the assignment process. While "Service need" is and always has been the first consideration in making assignments, "assignment priority" is the next consideration in the enlisted assignment decision process. Individual personal qualifications are not a major part of the assignment decision because the present system assumes any person of a certain pay grade and rate can fill any billet of that pay grade and rate. Along with performance, commanding officer's recommendation, length of time at present unit, etc., a member's qualifications are one of numerous factors Assignment Officers consider when making assignment decisions. Assignment priority is presently the single most effective incentive for our people to volunteer for arduous duty. Tours of duty on large cutters, overseas units, and isolated stations are the least desired billets. Our present system was designed to encourage personnel to volunteer for these duties, and in fact, many do just that, hoping to get their "dream job" afterwards or return to their previous (often favorite) duty station. Severely restricting the number of billets a member with a high assignment priority can choose from would compromise the present system. Historically this system has enjoyed some success. However, the number of volunteers for arduous duty still is insufficient to cover Service need. Assignment priority often does allow a lesser-qualified member to request and receive a billet over a more qualified one. As the Coast Guard acquires more technically sophisticated platforms and equipment while at the same time staffing units with fewer people, finding members to assign who already possess most, if not all, the requisite skills is becoming critical to effective operations. We have less time to train and qualify members both before they arrive and after they report aboard, although the skills required are often more extensive. The substantial cost of providing all new personnel with pipeline training becomes prohibitive.

This is especially true in the aviation and surfman communities. In both cases we adopted a qualifications-based assignment process. Basically, we elevated "desired qualifications" to the "Service need" level. JUNIPER, IDA LEWIS, and HEALY cutter class program managers also are requesting to assign personnel to those units based on qualifications. These "optimally-manned" vessels require just about every crew member to be fully qualified on reporting aboard and every billet to be filled with a qualified person at all times. It is likely members previously assigned to these vessel classes will be the primary crew replacement pool.

Like all personnel policies, any single policy will never meet everyone's conceivable needs. I consider the Human Resource System to be much like a toothpaste tube - squeeze it in any one place, and the

paste oozes out somewhere else. Without a doubt, our present enlisted assignment system is very "member friendly" or "member-centric" -- it was designed to be. A qualifications-based assignment system will not place the member's personal desires above all else and raises several concerns. More qualifications-based assignment communities may mean many fewer volunteers for arduous or sea duty and/or members becoming "locked into" communities from which there is only a small number of qualified personnel available to draw. The latter may translate into longer sea time for those members whose jobs already require a substantial amount of time at sea, EMs and QMs for example. We must implement these changes carefully, fully analyzing their impacts on the workforce, especially retention.

As we look towards the future, it is likely at least the AMT, AVT, AST, BM, QM, EM, MK, ET, TC, TT, RD, FT, GM and FS enlisted ratings will require some qualifications-based assignments.

Regards, FL Ames

[Flag Voice Contents](#)

This page is maintained by [HR Webmaster \(CG-1A\)](#)